Review
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BOOK REVIEWS

The Brothers Grimm and Folktale. Edited by James M. McGlathery, with Larry Danielson, Ruth E. Lorbe, and Selma K. Richardson. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, Illini Books Edition, [1988] 1991. Pp. xvi + 258, preface, introduction, illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. Price not given)

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This book, which collects 14 essays from a 1986 symposium at the University of Illinois on the Brothers Grimm, was first published in 1988 in hardcover and is now being issued in paperback. When it was first published, the book was clearly important: it contained the latest essays by some of the most noted Grimm scholars in this country and abroad, it addressed a wide variety of issues, it displayed a diversity of methodological approaches, and it was readable. Thus, it was a valuable index for general reader and scholar alike of the then-current state of Grimm scholarship.

Today, seven years after the symposium, the essays are no longer "cutting edge," but the volume is still valuable because it is one of the few books available that look at the important issue of interpretation in light of recent theoretical and methodological advances in humanistic study. As McGlathery notes, ever since the publication of Bettelheim's psychoanalytic interpretation of fairy tales, the question of the tales' "meaning" has been of great interest. However, scholars today can no longer analyze tales with quite the same confidence Bettelheim displayed. Today we are much more aware of the relativity of meaning, the range and complexity of interpretive processes, and the variety of cultural functions that stories can serve. This collection succeeds because it takes seriously the age-old desire for meaning at the same time that it manages to articulate clearly some of the thorniest problems associated with the search for meaning in folklore. Many of the essays in this volume are still fresh and interesting because the issues they tackle—the sociohistorical context of the tales, the relationship of the tales in the Grimms' *ouevre* to the general tale type, the problems of source, revision, and cross-genre transmission—remain as central to the problem of interpretation as ever.

The signal essay by German scholar Lutz Rohrich productively reflects on the problematics of humanistic study—or on the conflicting facts, as he puts it, that "most interpretations are only assessments of probability. Nevertheless the aim of the humanities is to arrive at valid interpretations" (p. 12). Rohrich separates the concept of interpretive validity (which is possible to attain) from interpretive certainty (which is impossible to attain). In this way, he gives scholars permission to offer necessarily "wrong" interpretations because without interpretation some of the most meaningful questions that folklore poses would remain unanswered. The next 13 essays may be understood as attempts to formulate what might constitute "interpretive validity" in an ouevre in which issues of text and context are strikingly complex.

The essay by Alan Dundes plays an important role in this work by revealing the danger of taking one or even several texts for exegesis without knowing the full background of a tale type. Dundes's essay shows how interpretation can proceed using hundreds of versions of a text, thus providing a scholarly model by which folklorists and literary critics can begin to end their decades-old standoff. He also offers a reasonable interpretation of "Little Red Riding Hood," based on the common characteristics of the tale type (rather than on a single version). However, although his interpretation is convincingly demonstrated, it somehow fails to persuade, perhaps because it relies so heavily on psychoanalytic paradigms that tend to formulate meaning in personal, familial, and sexual terms. The

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inherent limitations of psychoanalytic theory stand out in a volume that so richly elaborates the social, historical, economic, and cultural contexts of the Grimms' ouevre.

The essays by Jack Zipes and Ruth Bottigheimer, for example, provide an interesting counterpoint to Dundes by revealing the ways in which meaning can be historical, cultural, and social. Zipes combines biographical and historical approaches to try to understand the conditions that prompted the brothers to launch their project in the first place, and Bottigheimer reveals the social and cultural forces at work in the brothers' editing and revision of the texts. The essays by Zipes and Bottigheimer focus on the ideological function of the tales in their society, thus suggesting that meanings can be layered—that the social needs of a particular group can be written over the so-called universal meanings. But as fascinating as Zipes's and Bottigheimer's essays are, it is clear that they cannot fully answer the hermeneutic questions that Dundes's more traditional work foregrounds: Why *these* stories? Why *these* settings, plots, and characters? What did they mean then? What do they mean now? The obvious differences between the approaches of Dundes on one hand and Zipes and Bottigheimer on the other strike me as one of the volume's most productive tensions.

The most interesting essays in the collection—the ones by Stone, Tatar, Dégh, and Hearn—move to fill the void that the above tension creates. They succeed in merging analyses of text and context. These essays investigate what happens to meaning as tales cross genre boundaries, as well as temporal and social boundaries. Stone's essay looks at the variations in a single tale across several genres—oral tale, printed version, and film. Dégh investigates a phenomenon that has not been widely recognized—the extent to which printed versions of a tale effect oral retellings. Her essay prepares the ground for studies of the Grimms' considerable influence in modern media and pop culture. Tatar's essay reveals a significant shift in meaning that occurred as the Bluebeard tale was domesticated by Perrault and the Grimms. She shows how their versions of the tale adopted an antifeminine bias characteristic of bourgeois or industrial societies. Hearn discusses how changes in the structure of the juvenile publishing industry have effected issues such as which tales get retold for today's children and how they are retold. Hearn's essay is a pertinent illustration from our own time of one of the volume's major principles—that the form and content of folktales shift according to the various needs (economic, personal, social, political, historical) of the tellers and listeners. Even though each of these essays addresses the problems of interpretation implicitly, I cannot help feeling disappointed that the authors stop short of actual exegesis, especially when they seem poised to give fresh interpretations. Nevertheless, their contributions are invaluable for the way they reveal the various cultural processes at work behind the stories we read and tell.

Märchen-Lesarten von Kindern. Eine empirische Studie. By Kristin Wardetzky. (Berlin/New York/Frankfurt/Basel: Peter Lang, 1992. Pp. 253, tables and diagrams, notes, bibliography. $29.80 cloth)

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Readers of this journal had an opportunity to become acquainted with the chief points of Kristin Wardetzky's pathbreaking study of children and fairy tales in an article that appeared three years ago in the April–June 1990 issue. Now it is possible to gain access to the entire study in the fullness of its rich data and analytic detail. The material is so extensive that researchers in related fields will doubtless mine her charts to draw a variety of additional conclusions about children's fairy-tale production.

This book offers children's own statements in their own words instead of projecting the views of adults, the chief weakness of many psychoanalytic studies of fairy tales. As such, this broadly based study has a triple value: the author has discovered new methods for analyzing the classic genre of the fairy tale; she links contemporary versions

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